

## ***Sermon***

### ***Build Up Each Other***

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Bacon Memorial Presbyterian Church

November 19, 2023

I have included two scriptures in your bulletin this morning – one is Psalm 90 and the other is a reading from Thessalonians. I did not include the Gospel from Matthew but I will be reading it and referencing it as well – I already did a bit in the Children’s Message but these all fit together in a powerful way.

Let’s start with thinking on the timeframe that each of the scriptures are written and what kind of lifestyle and environment may have affected the content. The Psalm was written in ancient Israel, during exile and likely by Moses Biblical historians say. So understanding what the Israelites and Moses are experiencing, it is sensible that the language reflects upon the “rath” of God. Now as our liturgist stated, this Psalm is credited to Moses but it is written for and by the community. Community comes together in prayer and brings their concerns to God, much as we do today for the purpose of finding a “dwelling place” – somewhere that we can feel safe, nurtured and loved despite what is going on around us. Again, hopefully for you, this is true as well.

Another reference made in this Psalm and in Thessalonians is the brevity of life on Earth. Let’s think about this for a second. How many of you know the names and lives of your great-great grandfathers and grandmothers? How about great-great-great? While some may, and now with Ancestry and ways to locate at least modern era information, it is not impossible to discover who we are related to

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Inspired by [Workingpreacher. Org](https://www.workingpreacher.org) commentary on Matthew 25: 14-30 by Carla Works, Professor, Wesley Theological Seminary; commentary on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 by Kristopher Phan Coffman, Professor, Luther Seminary and commentary on Psalm 90: 1-12 by W. H. Bellinger, Jr, Emeritus Professor of Religion, Baylor University.

back several hundred years. But most of us keep our point of reference within our own lifetimes and perhaps one or two generations prior. In other words, the measurement of our lives is quite short in the scheme of things and our great – great – great grandchildren may not know our names or anything specifically about us. Listen to the 1 Thessalonians 5:- 1-5, the first paragraph in your bulletin.

*“<sup>5</sup>Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers and sisters, you do not need to have anything written to you. <sup>2</sup>For you yourselves know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup>When they say, “There is peace and security,” then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and there will be no escape! <sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness.”*

There’s an important detail about 1 Thessalonians that we need to recognize as we reflect on it. 1st Thessalonians is the oldest book in the New Testament. It is the first of the letters of Paul, written before any of his other letters and even before the Gospels. This letter gives us a glimpse into the concerns of one of the first communities outside of Syria-Palestine to receive the good news of Jesus Christ.

This reference to light and dark is something is again reflective of the time period. I recall when I moved from Tonawanda to Newfane and looking up one of those first nights to see all the stars that I never saw because of the city lights. And to experience darkness – I mean dark where you have to take a flashlight if you’re

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walking outside after sunset. I had been so desensitized to true darkness living with electric light my whole life. But in Paul's era at this early, early time, darkness was complete except for whatever the Universe provided such as moonlight.

*<sup>4</sup>But you, beloved, are not in darkness, for that day to surprise you like a thief; <sup>5</sup>for you are all children of light and children of the day; we are not of the night or of darkness."*

So how do we truly live into being Children of the Day. I have been taking heed to the beauty of sunrises recently. If any of you happen to follow me on Facebook, I post them regularly. The splendor is just overwhelming sometimes of the beauty that I see with my eyes. Even when I arrive here at church, it's beaming through these beautiful windows – is that light that Paul is referring to. To be that – to be so beautiful that one cannot not see it?

The Gospel of Matthew 25:14-30. Again, let's focus on time period. I, like you, am very uncomfortable with any reference to slavery even when it comes with a great lesson. Not defending – the way the people lived then was flawed as it is now, but our modern reference of slavery is not what this was – it was not kidnapping, torturing, and treating like property. These were people born into this way of life but there were able to with work, earn their way out of it, not that it was common to do so. And owners were expected to care for their workers though they did mistreat them. So putting aside that flaw, there is still an important message of truth in this scripture. And, Ironically the word "talent" is referring to a monetary value – Although the first laborer receives five times as much as the last,

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each receives a significant sum of money. A talent is equal to about 6,000 denarii. Since one denarius is a common laborer's daily wage, a talent would be roughly equivalent to 20 years wages for the average worker. Five talents, the largest amount entrusted to any of the servants, is comparable to one hundred years' worth of labor, an astronomical amount of money. With that in mind, hear the Gospel of Matthew and as I read it, I want to listen for who relate to...which slave or even the landowner...

*<sup>14</sup>"For it is as if a man, going on a journey, summoned his slaves and entrusted his property to them; <sup>15</sup>to one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. <sup>16</sup>The one who had received the five talents went off at once and traded with them, and made five more talents. <sup>17</sup>In the same way, the one who had the two talents made two more talents. <sup>18</sup>But the one who had received the one talent went off and dug a hole in the ground and hid his master's money. <sup>19</sup>After a long time the master of those slaves came and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup>Then the one who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five more talents, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me five talents; see, I have made five more talents.' <sup>21</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>22</sup>And the one with the two talents also came forward, saying, 'Master, you handed over to me two talents; see, I have made two more talents.' <sup>23</sup>His master said to him, 'Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.' <sup>24</sup>Then the one who*

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*had received the one talent also came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew that you were a harsh man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you did not scatter seed; <sup>25</sup>so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here you have what is yours.' <sup>26</sup>But his master replied, 'You wicked and lazy slave! You knew, did you, that I reap where I did not sow, and gather where I did not scatter? <sup>27</sup>Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and on my return I would have received what was my own with interest. <sup>28</sup>So take the talent from him, and give it to the one with the ten talents. <sup>29</sup>For to all those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. <sup>30</sup>As for this worthless slave, throw him into the outer darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'*

So if look at the Psalm of lament – those moments in life that leave us scared, anxious – worried. And then Paul says – “When they say, “there is peace and security”, then sudden destruction will come upon them, as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman” – where are we being drawn? Do we spend too much time like the slave who buried the talent because well life can be unpredictable, life can leave us a little trepidatious at times. We’ve all had trauma – we’ve all lost things we thought we wouldn’t. So why wouldn’t we want to be a little cautious right?

Each of us is given a talent – something we can do maybe well, easily, with joy, something that makes us feel comfortable within our own skin. Now, sharing it with others can be terrifying. Do you remember when you realized maybe as a

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child that you had a particular talent? I do...it was 6<sup>th</sup> grade and I had always loved to sing but this was the first time I would be singing alone in front of someone other than my family. My school was putting on a small musical production and I wanted to try out. And I remember my teacher calling my mom to tell her I could sing and did she know that. And then as I got older it became clear to me that my voice would be best served in church. I'm never going to win a singing competition or be famous for it – but I have always offered to sing in church – choir, as a worship leader. It is a joy for me, not to say I don't get nervous – I do...but I never buried it. If I had, I would have missed out on all the things I've done. I've sung at funerals – my mother-in-law, my uncle and so many more. I've sung at weddings, my daughters' baptisms, and here week in and week out. What a pleasure it is to do so.

And like the those who “invested” we too grow our own ministry, our own lives, our own light, when we use the talents God has given us.

So I will leave you with this question – What is something about yourself that you love? Oh I know, you're thinking, I don't want to be boastful – it is not – loving who you are is not boastful – it is the truest sense of loving God. Our talents are not something we created – you can't make yourself become something you have no talent for – that ability in you came from God – that gift in you IS God. Keeping things small, safe – for this short time we have in this life makes it impossible for you to shine like the sunrise, building up each other with the gifts we have been given – let go of whatever is holding you back. You are beautiful, you are incredible – and while in the future they might not remember our names, they will benefit

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from the contributions we make or will suffer for those we do not to this same Earth they will inhabit someday. I don't know all the names of those who started this church 101 years ago – but I do know their passion and love of God and community makes this ministry possible today. **All who would follow Jesus are to preach the good news of the kingdom to the whole world (24:14) by going about the work that the master has called them to do (24:24-51). By building up each other...**

Amen